

First Sergeant Duty

MASTER SERGEANT BERTRAM F. VAUGHAN

The first sergeant's role in the Army is time-honored and rich in custom and tradition. The primary duties of the first sergeant have changed very little since the days of the American Revolution, when General Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben described them:

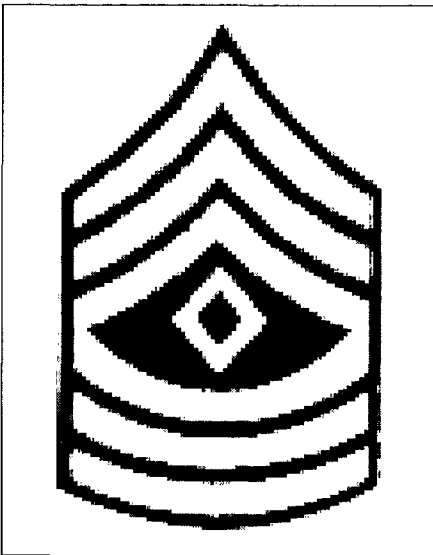
- Enforce discipline and encourage duty among troops.
- Maintain the duty roster.
- Keep the company descriptive book. (This book listed the name, age, height, place of birth, and prior occupation of every enlisted man in the unit. Today, it would be known as a "Leader Book.")

Still, the duties included under these three broad headings are so complex that one manual could not hold all of the information required.

A 35-day first sergeant course is taught at Fort Bliss, Texas, under the auspices of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. This course is fast-paced and designed for first-time first sergeants. Several posts offer a five-day orientation course designed to familiarize commanders and first ser-

geants with local policies and procedures.

A first sergeant must have a high level of competence, energy, and motivation, and must be able to communi-



cate effectively. He promotes enlisted welfare, morale, and health issues; helps the commander maintain discipline and standards of conduct; and provides guidance on matters of leadership,

military justice, and customs and courtesies. A first sergeant's professional conduct and appearance must be exemplary.

If you are motivated by the challenge of personal and professional managerial growth, this could be the job for you. If you are willing to deal with real people, real issues, and refine your counseling skills, this could be the job for you. If you are willing to deal with case after case of negative issues, only to help and occasionally make a difference with that one soldier, this could be the job for you. These types of intrinsic rewards will carry you through and give you what it takes to be a first sergeant.

The Interview

Although the Department of the Army assigns first sergeants and master sergeants to units, the battalion commander and command sergeant major (CSM) decide who will be first sergeant. The following are some of the traits and qualities that will be expected of you:

Desire and motivation. First, you

must really *want* to be a first sergeant; if you don't, you may prove to be a detriment to the unit.

Integrity. Your integrity must be above reproach. Commanders and soldiers must be able to trust you and know that they can talk to you in confidence when they need to.

Leadership. A good first sergeant will also serve as a good mentor. If you are leading the way, soldiers will want to do things the way you do them. You should set aside time to share experiences with young leaders to make them better NCOs.

Dedication to duty. You must develop a system that will enable the unit to accomplish all its missions. This can mean starting before the duty day and completing it after day's end. You must also check on training to ensure that the commander's intent is being met.

Tactical knowledge. No longer is there a *field* first sergeant or *field* soldiers, just *soldiers*. Field training actually starts in the garrison area and can determine success in the field; that is, Sergeant's Time training. In the field, you must be able to spot-check positions, or maneuver with an element to

strengthen the leadership.

Counseling development. Counsel the platoon sergeants, teaching them how to do their jobs and how to develop their subordinate NCOs.

Knowledge of regulations. Regulations change often, and you will have to stay abreast of the updates.

Keeping the commander informed. As the company's senior enlisted advisor, you will have to be able to talk to the commander on behalf of the soldiers so that he will have the information he needs to make the best decisions for the soldiers and the mission.

Standards. You will have to lead from the front and set the standard, not only in uniform appearance and on the Army Physical Fitness Test, but in off-duty conduct as well. When soldiers see the first sergeant out doing physical training, they push themselves that much harder. Upholding the seven Army values—loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, personal courage—is essential to unit cohesion.

Time management. Develop a schedule. Allow yourself time to check your e-mail messages without tying

yourself to your desk, check on soldiers and the daily unit operations, and allow time for the CSM/First Sergeant meetings.

Military justice. You must be familiar with the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Then, do what you know is right, and make the appropriate recommendations for disciplinary measures.

Commanders will also expect the following from you as first sergeant:

- Support the CSM.
- Handle all soldier problems, and keep the commander informed.
- Make sure instructions are followed and tasks are completed.

This list is far from all that is needed to accomplish all of the tasks associated with first sergeant duties. I have brought out some key points. Several lessons will be taught by the CSM, while many others will be taught by experience on the job.

Master Sergeant Bertram F. Vaughan was S-3 NCOIC of the 1st Battalion, 174th Infantry Brigade, at Fort Drum.
